



Thanksgiving Day Food Safety Tips

Thanksgiving is upon us and with it comes the traditional turkey dinner. However, the improper storing, cooking, and serving of roast turkey can lead to the growth of harmful bacteria like [salmonella](#), which can cause foodborne illness.

The DuPage County Health Department advises consumers that safe food handling of turkey and other holiday foods is essential in preventing foodborne illness. Here are some tips to share with your family for preparing a Thanksgiving bird safely.

- Thaw the frozen turkey in the refrigerator. Allow one day for each five pounds of turkey. A twenty-pound turkey will take about four days to thaw. Hint: Remove neck & giblets from inside the bird as soon as possible to hasten thawing.
- Do not thaw on the kitchen counter. If you do not have time to thaw in the refrigerator, you may thaw it in cold water, provided that the turkey is in a leak-proof packaging, it is submerged, and the water is changed every half-hour. Allow 30 minutes per pound of turkey to thaw in cold water.
- Cook fresh turkeys within two days, thawed ones within four days.
- Wash your hands with hot, soapy water before and after handling raw poultry. Wash all knives, cutting boards and utensils also after using for raw poultry.
- Read and follow the cooking directions on the label. Cook turkey until it is done (165°F). Do not slow cook overnight at low temperatures or partially cook. Some turkeys come with pop-up thermometers. They are to be used only as a guide to doneness. [Take the temperature with a meat thermometer](#) to be sure the temperature is over 165°F.
- Stuffing should not be prepared a day ahead and the turkey should not be stuffed until ready to cook. A quicker, safer method is to cook the stuffing separately in a casserole, using some of the pan juices to flavor and moisten the stuffing.
- Eat the meal as soon as it is prepared. Do not leave leftovers out on the counter or table after dinner. Cut the meat off the bones and put it in shallow containers in the refrigerator.
- Reheat all leftovers to 165°F. (Use your meat thermometer.) Gravy should be brought to a rolling boil.

Follow these simple tips to help assure your family and guests a safe Thanksgiving Day. For more information on food safety, see [Peachy Keen's Food Safety in the Home](#).